

JUNE HEALTH TIP

This year Sun Safety week is being observed June 3rd through the 9th but being safe in the sun is important every day of the year. This month's health tip is going to explain why this is true and offer some suggestions for protecting yourself from the sun.

Let's first review a few facts:

- Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States.
- During the course of a lifetime, one in 5 Americans and one in 3 Caucasians will develop skin cancer, and the risk for skin cancer doubles for those who experience 5 or more sunburns.
- Keep in mind that tanning is actually the result of damage to our skin- ultraviolet radiation causes changes in the DNA of our cells, which can lead to mutations and potentially cancer.
- Lastly, although Melanoma, the third most common and most dangerous skin cancer, is seen less often in African-Americans, Latinos, and Asians, it is most deadly for these populations because it is more likely to develop undetected. This is important because when Melanoma is recognized and treated early, it is nearly 100 percent curable.

The best way for a person to prevent skin cancer is to use sun-protective practices. Consider the following suggestions:

- Seek shade, especially during midday hours (10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.), when ultraviolet rays are strongest and do the most damage.
- Cover up with clothing to protect exposed skin. Densely woven fabrics and darker colors protect better than loose weaves or lighter colors.
- Get a hat with a wide brim, at least 4 inches all the way around, to shade the face, head, ears, and neck.
- Grab sunglasses that wrap around and block as close to 100% of both UVA and UVB rays as possible.
- Rub on sunscreen with sun protective factor (SPF) 15 or higher, and look for “broad spectrum” sunscreen, which protects against both UVA and UVB rays.
- Apply sunscreen 20-30 minutes prior to sun exposure and re-apply every 2 hours.
- Keep newborns out of the sun. Sunscreens should be used on babies over the age of six months.

- Be aware that the harmful effects of ultraviolet radiation are accentuated by wind and reflective surfaces such as water, snow, concrete and sand.
- Stay away from tanning beds. Numerous studies have shown that tanning beds increases a person's risk for skin cancer. Some salons argue that "controlled" tanning helps prevent melanoma by building up the protective pigment melanin. The truth is that tanning, like burning, causes genetic damage to the cells- no protective effects are realized by damaging the skin.
- Try self-tanning products, or sunless tanning lotions as a healthy alternative. They work by temporarily dying the top layer of the skin. The color slowly fades as the skin cells slough off, and usually disappear within a week unless the lotion has been reapplied. In the case of suntans, fading also occurs after a few days but the harm done to the skin is permanent.

Please visit the “Health Information & Resources” page of the Health Department’s website for more information on sun safety and healthy alternatives for achieving a sunless tan.

Resources

2007 skin cancer facts, Skin Cancer Foundation, <http://www.skincancer.org/skincancer-facts.php>

Important information, SunGuardMan Online, <http://www.sunguardman.org/suntext2.html>

Melanoma, Skin Cancer Foundation, <http://www.skincancer.org/melanoma/index.php>

Protective clothing, SunGuardMan Online, <http://www.sunguardman.org/protect3.html>

SCF tips, Skin Cancer Foundation, <http://www.skincancer.org/content/view/66/6/>

Skin cancer prevention and education initiative, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/pdf/0607_skin_fs.pdf

Tan in a can, Skin Cancer Foundation, <http://www.skincancer.org/artificial/sunless.php>

The case against indoor tanning, Skin Cancer Foundation, <http://www.skincancer.org/artificial/index.php>

The dangers of tanning, Skin Cancer Foundation, <http://www.skincancer.org/content/view/35/8/>

What is ultraviolet radiation?, SunGuardMan Online, <http://www.sunguardman.org/suntext1.html>